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THE ILLINOIS STATE CAPITOL GROUNDS.

By MRS. JOHN M. PALMER.

Thomas Mather from whose widow, a portion of the present site of the Capitol of the State of Illinois was purchased, was born in Wetauk, Connecticut in the year 1796, and was a direct descendant of the famous Cotton Mather. In 1820 he was sent by the government at Washington to look after its interests in connection with the Santa Fe fur trade where he was accompanied by George C. Sibley who afterwards became famous as an Indian factor at Fort Osage and later was a prominent citizen of St. Charles County, Mo.

At that time, the small French village of Kaskaskia, the first Capital of our state was an attractive place for an enterprising young man, and Mr. Mather became a pioneer of Illinois.

He engaged in the mercantile business there, and in Chester, in connection with Pierre Menard, (whose statue was placed upon the Capitol grounds several years ago) and James Lea Lamb.

In 1825 Mr. Mather married* Miss Hannah Gibson Lamb the sister of his partner James Lea Lamb, and in 1835 or 1836 removed to Springfield and bought the home of John B. Watson, now the northern portion of the Capitol grounds. Mr. Watson afterwards went to California and returned to fall a victim to cholera, during its prevalence in

Note by the Editor. Mrs. Hannah Lamb Palmer the writer of this interesting bit of history is the widow of Gen. John M. Palmer. Her maiden name was Hannah Mather Lamb. She is the niece and namesake of Mrs. Thomas Mather, who after the death of her husband Mr. Thomas Mather March 28, 1853, owned the land upon which the Illinois State Capitol now stands. Mrs. Palmer is the daughter of James Lea Lamb and Susan Cranmer Lamb. She was born in Springfield, July 6, 1838.

As a child and young girl she was an especial favorite of her aunt Mrs. Mather and spent a great deal of time at the Mather home. She is therefore more than anyone now living competent to tell the story of the State House grounds.

* The Illinois State Historical Library owns a file of the Illinois Intelligencer published in Vandalia. The paper of Dec. 15, 1825 contains the following notice: "Married at Kaskaskia on Sunday evening the 4 inst. by the Rev. Mr. Chase of New Orleans, Thomas Mather, Esq., late Speaker of the House of Representatives to Miss Hannah G. Lamb, both of Kaskaskia."



MRS. JOHN M. PALMER

1852. Mr. Watson and his daughters, Margaret and Ellen C. died of cholera, August 11, 1852.

Soon after coming to Springfield Mr. Mather was made President of the State Bank which was organized at Springfield May 11, 1835. He was a member of the General Assembly in 1820, the second General Assembly of the State, and re-elected in 1822, 1824 and 1828 as a member of the lower house from Randolph County. In 1832 he was elected to the State Senate, also from Randolph County. His nature was generous and kind, was fond of children and although blessed with none of their own, many an orphan niece and nephew found with them, a happy, contented home. His wife, the Aunt for whom I was named belonged to the lovely sect known as Quakers, and by her calm poise of character was indeed a "help-mate." Altho she forfeited her "birth-right" by marriage with one outside, I am sure no regret was ever expressed, save that of having caused grief to others, and she was permitted to retain her membership and there being no "meeting house" nearer than Richmond, Indiana she continued her membership there, and while dressing plainly, as consistent with her views, her raiment was of the finest and most expensive texture.

It was in this lovely house and garden that this aunt gave me a birthday party on my sixth birthday, July 6, 1844, which I well remember although more than three quarters of a century have elapsed since that happy day.

Their home soon became a haven for the gathering of choice spirits. And it was there that Dorothea L. Dix made her home, when she came in 1846-1847 on her mission of mercy to the hither-to neglected Insane of the State of Illinois, and in this home, she conferred with Dr. Julian M. Sturtevant of Jacksonville, and was encouraged by him to bring the subject before the State Legislature, the beneficent results of which who can tell.

The "Underground Railway" was also freely discussed, and for the benefit of those who do not understand, let it be known that for a brief time slavery existed in our fair State of Illinois and even after the "Missouri Compromise" a slave found in a free state, could be returned to his former home.

"The underground railroad" was a secret and safe transfer to Canada, where he or she was safe from further pursuit.

This hill, so called, included another lot south of the Mather property extending from Second to Spring streets with the exception of one corner at the extreme southwest end, and was considered as "haunted" by the spirit of an innocent victim hung through circumstantial evidence, for murder. The man who was supposed to have been murdered appeared in flesh and blood years after and refuted the sad story, and after that occurred boys and girls no longer hastened through the dreaded woods, "before dark" in fear of meeting the restless ghost. Later it was there, that I listened to an impassioned address from Hon. Cassius M. Clay of Kentucky.

The vacant lot was also much used for the holding of religious gatherings, known as Basket Meetings, a species of camp meeting.

In 1864 this lot was sold by Mrs. John Simonds of St. Louis to me for four thousand (\$4,000) dollars, and later it became the property of Hon. James C. Conkling from whom it was bought by the State with the Mather property already mentioned to become the burial place of our martyred President. Excavation for the tomb was already begun on the north side of the Mather property, fronting East, when Mrs. Lincoln interfered for personal reasons, and his cherished body was placed in the vault at Oak Ridge Cemetery, to remain until the present magnificent monument and vault were erected. Later, these grounds were used for out-of-door religious services until the foundation of the present Capitol building was begun, about the year 1867.

COPY OF A PORTION OF THE ACT OF THE LEGIS-
LATURE, WHICH AUTHORIZED THE ERECTION
OF THE NEW STATE HOUSE, AND WHICH DE-
SCRIBES THE LAND UPON WHICH THE
CAPITOL WAS LATER ERECTED.
IN FORCE FEB. 25, 1867.

*From Statutes of Illinois, 25th General Assembly, 1867.
Page 6.*

AN ACT to provide for the erection of a new state house.

SECTION 1. *Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois, represented in the General Assembly, That the gover-*

nor of the state of Illinois, is hereby authorized and empowered to convey to the county of Sangamon and state of Illinois, and to the City of Springfield, in said county, for the use of the people of said county and city, all that piece and parcel of ground situate, lying and being in the city of Springfield, in said county, known as the public square, containing two acres and a half, be the same more or less, upon which is now located the state house, for the sum of two hundred thousand dollars, and for the further consideration that said grantees shall cause to be conveyed to the state of Illinois, in fee simple, that parcel of ground, lying in the city of Springfield, aforesaid, bounded by Second, Monroe, Spring and Charles streets, containing between eight and nine acres. Said sum of two hundred thousand dollars shall be paid into the treasury of the state of Illinois, in two equal installments, the first of which shall be paid on the first day of April, 1868, and the second on the first day of April, 1869.

SECTION 2. The county of Sangamon and said city of Springfield are hereby authorized to issue such bonds and levy such taxes as may be necessary to raise said sum of two hundred thousand dollars, and for the purchase of said parcel of land; *Provided*, said bonds shall not bear interest exceeding ten per cent. per annum.

SECTION 3. Said sum of two hundred thousand dollars shall be expended towards the erection of a new state house upon said last described parcel of land; and in addition thereto the sum of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars is hereby appropriated, out of any money in the treasury not otherwise appropriated for the same purpose. Said state house shall cost a sum not exceeding three millions of dollars.